

ENHANCING ENGLISH WRITING PERFORMANCE THROUGH BLOGGING AT HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract

The present study seeks to identify the effectiveness of blogging for enhancing English writing performance of Higher Secondary School Students. The writing performance of the students was measured in terms of the vocabulary and language of the text. A true experimental design was used to measure the effects of blogging and pen & paper tools at one of the Government Higher Secondary Schools for Boys. After pre-test sixty eight students of 2nd year were randomly divided into two equal mixed-ability group blogging and pen & paper. The students of both groups wrote 24 texts in the form of essays, summaries, and character-sketches writings from their syllabus according to the schedule of the eight weeks treatment. The pre and post-tests were validated by a committee of six experienced English language experts. After the treatment a similar-structured post-test was administered to find out the difference. Two raters evaluated the students in both tests according to the developed rubric with combative weight age to each aspect. The average score given by two raters was assigned to each student. The salient difference of blogging group was peer review and peer feedback. Findings of the study showed that the effects of blogging were significant in terms of vocabulary and language of text. Technology, internet, peer review, and peer feedback motivated the students to write with eagerness. They found blogging interesting and motivating platform and enhanced their English writing performance through blogging as compared to traditional pen & paper writing tools.

Keywords: English writing performance, Blogging, Pen & paper, Higher Secondary School Students.

Introduction

English language has been regarded as the most used and widely spread language across the world for many decades. English language is also called as “Lingua Franca” in the global village (Crystal, 2009). The grandness of English language has already been recognized by UNESCO, declaring it as one of the official languages of august institutions along with, French, Russian Arabic, Spanish and Chinese (UNESCO, 2015). Although in Pakistan comparatively English is used by influential authorities of the government departments working at administrative posts in commerce, higher education, mass media, and military etc., yet it is still considered as the official language of Pakistan. English as a foreign language is being taught as a compulsory subject in schools and colleges throughout the country. The efficient use of English requires mastery in four basic skills namely reading, writing, listening and speaking. Among all the four language learning skills writing is considered to be the more challenging, even the native speakers face problems due to its complications (Johnstone, 2002). However, this inefficiency in English writing stays with learners throughout their lives. English writing performance of the students in Pakistan is extremely weak and

substandard. As traditional teaching methods and writing tools motivate the students to re-write the memorized texts to go through the exams. Creative abilities and critical thinking are not focused. Sultana & Zaki, (2015) declared that there is a dire need to introduce innovative tools in English writing performance of the school students. Students must adopt latest learning pedagogy and language learning tools according to contemporary world. English writing skill is a cognitive process rather than natural capability (Harris, 1993), and it has required continuous practice, training and schooling on part of the students.

The demand of writing proficiency has increased due to globalization and proliferation (Akram & Malik, 2010). There has been a rapid spread of technologies, in the last decade and consequently, technologies of web 2.0, especially blogging both for teacher and student with new celestial horizons in the field of language study. In this age of technology, globalization, revolution of connectivity and information, English writing has become crucial demand for any learner who wants to follow up the vast changes in the world of knowledge. In the current research study, the researcher has tried to suggest a solution that teachers at Higher Secondary school level in public sector institutions may implement as part of their teaching techniques to develop English writing performance of the students. Since blogging is a proposed technique, which may improve creative thinking in writing performance of the students, the researcher decided to identify the effectiveness of employing blogging on developing writing performance of the students. After the review of literature the researcher concluded that there are various research studies available to verify the potentials of blogging in improving second language learning and particularly writing skills of the learners. However, blogging as writing tool is unexplored in Pakistan to date, for learning English in second language context. In this scenario the researcher felt intense need to conduct this study. English writing skills can be learnt in two ways, using updated technology tools and pen & paper tools. Blogging is one of the latest technology tools. The present study was therefore experimented to measure the effects of blogging on English writing performance of Higher Secondary School students in Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

Higher secondary school students face various difficulties in learning English writing. It is conceived that blogging provides motivational influence and inducement to language learners and particularly to learning of writing on the grounds that it puts vehemence on vocabulary and language, the likelihood of rapid input, the choice of working with audios, videos, pictures and words. Thus, with this study it was aimed to find if blogging has a potential to enhance students' writing performance.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been set to guide the present study:

1. To assess the vocabulary and language in English writing performance of Higher Secondary School students.
2. To compare the vocabulary in text of pen & paper and blogging groups.
3. To compare the language in text of pen & paper and blogging groups.

Hypotheses

Following hypotheses were made for achieving the objectives.

H_{01} : There is no significant difference between the vocabulary of the text in blogging and pen & paper groups.

H_{02} : There is no significant difference between the language of text in blogging and pen & paper groups.

Review of Literature

Writing is a tool of communication. Wu and Ru-Chu Shih (2010) stated that creative writing is an exercise of life integration into words or language. The writer uses depth, language, and originality to make writing meaningful. This enriches life and vitalizes the use of language. Writing a creative text is combination of the four language skills i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading, along with proficiency and competence in language. Due to complexity of writing it is difficult skill for school students. Creativity consists of various genres such as fictions, poems, essays, novels and dramas etc. Abbas (2016) declared that all human beings have greater or less creative capabilities with a range of different forms. In present study creativity means essay, summary, and character-sketch writings. Through these writings students can express their ideas, feelings, opinions, and reactions etc., in their own style, considering the vocabulary and language of their texts. Nepomuceno (2011) stated that out of four language learning skills, writing is the most difficult one. Especially school students are not much enthusiastic about writing skill, because it is basically a desk activity, where students cannot stand up and move around as they do in other three skills of language learning. Soven (1999) further explains the views that most of the students hate writing by the time when they join High and Higher Secondary schools, as it gets more demanding for them. Kiran, (2010); Ahmed, (2004); and Haider, (2012) condemns faulty teaching method of school and college teachers as the sole reason of weaknesses in writing of Higher Secondary school students. Different research studies have been conducted at international and national levels to teach listening, speaking, and reading skills by using mobile phones and other social media like face book and blogs (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Baleghi & Oladrostam, 2010; Cheng, 2010; Power & Shestha, 2010; Sife, 2010; Aziz, 2013; Yousaf & Ahmed, 2013; Waqar, 2014). Warsi, (2004) finds a wide gap between the practices of instructors and modern teaching methods in Pakistan.

Four kinds of teaching approaches has been used in teaching of writing across the world. These four approaches include the genre approach, the product approach, the process approach and the process genre approach. The Process approach has been used in this study; it helped students in different stages of writing in elaborating. As Graves (1994) stated, the writer follows a simple design: she/he selects, composes, and reads; teachers organize writing not like product but a process that requires thinking and give meanings. This approach considers learners as writers and value is given to their work". Blogging focus and stress on activities relating to writing skills which transform learners to active, creative and learn new ideas from one another in cooperation and collaboration (Tribble, 1996). Sharing of ideas in writing process encourages learners to write eagerly (Graves, 1998). The teacher is facilitator and enhances the writing abilities of students by giving them feedback. Mostly, this approach has three writing stages like before writing, planning, and editing.

A blog primarily is connected with text-writing but can also be the format of images, films, photos, music, or sound (Zhang, 2009). Kupelian (2001) stated that blog as an open educational resource has not only shifted the writing process, yet it also increased involvement of students and strengthen motivation in writing process. Sun (2012) argues that learners are encouraged to write more and more through blogging. He further stated that there are number of advantages of blogging like creation of knowledge, enhancement of writing skills, construction of learning files, reduction of misspelling, and exchange of ideas between teachers and learners, and between students and students. Only blogging is not sufficient for improvement in writing

performance; Students' and peers' feedback on written texts is also necessary to help the students, and find out their gaps in writing, in this way they improve their vocabulary, content, language, style and organization in writing. Wu's (2006), Zhang (1995), and Yang & Badger (2006) reveal similar findings; participants of the research declared that teacher feedback is most essential as compared to learners' feedback. Ware (2008) declared in his study that language students are comfortable of their peer's individualized feedback on blog posts, with some who are also correcting grammar mistakes. However, there was little percentage of correction on transcripts. Findings indicated that learners only provide grammar correction unless they are given explicit directions (Ware, 2008). Hence, it was proved that feedback through blogging improves students' writing performance.

Teaching of writing through blogging is grounded from Learning Theory of Collaboration (CLT) and focuses on group and peer learning by different activities. Theory considers sharing as a primary element of collaboration in successful environment. Blogging as an element of computer-mediated communication (CMC) gives us a proper environment for the purpose of collaborative learning in which targeted language learners could share their ideas and feelings in cyberspace (Antoinette, Colombo & Lozotsev, 2008). The second theory which forms the base of learning through blogging is Socio-Culture Theory. The third theory in this connection is Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). According to Keller (2010) instructional activities strengthen the students' extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivation. In the present research, following to Keller's ARCS model the first part is "Attention" here the social media "blog" is used to attract the intermediate students for learning writing skill in English language. Learning of writing skills through blogging is in accordance with the Vygotsky theory of collaborative learning where students could improve their knowledge by sharing with teacher and peers.

Multiple research studies have been conducted with different results on blogging and blogs in English as Second Language (ESL) context. Study by Cambell, (2003) "Blog as Innovative Source of the Analysis of Data", explored students' attitudes to blog on language learning skills through a survey questionnaire. He took 57 students from different grades in four groups. It was concluded that maximum number of students told blogs to be good. Most of the students did not read posts of others or read just occasionally. They preferred class tasks to be completed. The participants who offered comments on students' posts were less. Most of the students did not use the links to other resources posted by researcher through blog posts. Majority of the students, despite of recognizing the efficiency of blogging, reported that they were unable to manage the blog's benefits. Simsek (2009) in his study discovered the effects of blogs integration in the writing skills pedagogy of second language learning. He collected data from 74 graduate students by distributing questionnaires about the benefits of blogs. Findings of the study showed that participants found blogs significant for instruction of second language learning.

Grami (2012) conducted a study on seven Arabian second language learners in a classroom blog project for the duration of four weeks. Each participant has to post a weekly blog entry maximum up to 250 words on the topic according to her/his choice. Each participant was also tasked to offer comments on two peers' posts each week. Followed by the project, during interviews, participants expressed positive attitudes about blogging, commenting, and peer feedback. Kelley (2008), Bayrak & Kocak Usluel (2011) measured the effects of blogs on students' writing achievements, neither the writing skill nor the attitudes of the students towards writing changed who used technology or who did not used. These research studies have not found any significant difference in blogging

and traditional tools of writing. On the contrary, O' Conner (2011), Quintero (2008), Nepomuceno (2011), Blackstone, Spiriand Neganuma (2007), Fageeh (2011), Guttler (2011) studies declared blogging has significant difference in writing achievements and attitudes of students towards writing in a collaborative learning environment.

Originally blogs were not developed for the purpose of language learning but they have potential for learning of 2nd language especially writing (Kavaliauskiene, Anusiene & Mazeikiene, 2006). Majority of studies in this area found that complete potentials of class blog is yet to be explored; a lot of research yet to be needed about how effectively blogs can be used in a writing class. Review of the related literature shows that there are sufficient research studies are available to use the potential of blogging in improving second language writing performance. However, as described earlier, to date blogging is underexplored in context of 2nd language learning in Pakistan. The current research has therefore been experimented to identify the effectiveness of blogging in teaching of English writing performance of Pakistani students.

Method and Procedure

Population and Sample

At the time the study was conducted, total enrolled (1751) students at (22) higher secondary schools at District Abbottabad in 2nd year class in the session 2021-22 constituted the population of this study (Source: BISE, District Education Officer Male Abbottabad). The researcher drew a sample of 68 students from 2nd year class at GHSS Bandi Dhundan Abbottabad by simple random sampling technique, using fishbowl sampling method. After taking pretest, the researcher formed two mixed-ability equivalent groups experimental (Blogging n= 34) and control (Pen & paper n=34) on the basis of marks obtained in the pre-test.

The Design of Study

Pre-test and Post-test Equivalent Control Group Design was used in this study which is given as under:

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test		
	R	C	O ₁	NT	O ₂
	R	E	O ₃	T	O ₄

Where R = Randomly Selected Groups.

C = Control Group

NT = Traditional writing to the Control Group

E = Experimental Group

T = Treatment to the Experimental Group

O = Observation

O₂-O₄= Difference between the post-test scores of experimental and control groups.

Validity and Reliability of the Tests

The instruments pre and post-tests of this study were validated by a committee of six language experts. The tests were piloted in the month of March 2022 at thirty students of 2nd year who were not part of the study. Tests consist of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings from intermediate English part-II syllabus. Students in the pilot study were evaluated in terms of vocabulary and language use. "Reliability Analysis" was done. The value of Cronbach's Alpha remained 0.868 in the pre-test and 0.870 in the post-test. There were only small changes which were rectified in the tests. After rectifying the suggested changes, the pre-test was administered.

Research Instrumentation

1. Researcher-made pre-test was administered in order to equate the control and experimental groups and to assess the level of English writing performance of the students.
2. Immediately after the treatment a similar-structured post-test was administered for re-assessment of English writing performance of the students.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Writing aspects wise frequency of pre-test in vocabulary and language use (n=68)

Writing Tasks	Score/Level	Vocabulary (2)		Language use (2)	
		(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Essay	(0) Low	12	17.0	18	26.4
	(1) Average	51	76.0	50	73.5
	(2) High	5	7.0	0	0
Summary	(0) Low	22	32.3	26	38.2
	(1) Average	44	64.7	42	61.7
	(2) High	2	2.9	0	0
Character-Sketch	(0) Low	24	35.2	28	41.2
	(1) Average	43	63.2	40	58.8
	(2) High	1	1.4	0	0

(f= Frequency, %= Percentage, n = number of students)

Table 1 shows the writing aspect wise performance level of 68 Higher Secondary School students with frequency and percent in the pre-test. The total marks of the pre-test were 12 and each aspect of writing in each writing task consisted of 2 marks. In essay the highest percentage (76.0) shows that students’ strongest writing aspect consisted of vocabulary. The lowest percentage (0) shows that students’ weakest writing aspect consisted of language. In summary the highest percentage (64.7) shows that students’ strongest writing aspect consisted of vocabulary. The lowest percentage (0) shows that students’ weakest writing aspect consisted of language. In character-sketch the highest percentage (63.2) shows that students’ strongest writing aspect consisted of vocabulary. The lowest percentage (0) shows that students’ weakest writing aspect consisted of language.

Table 2: Writing task wise frequency of pre-test (n=68)

Levels	Essay		Summary		Character-Sketch	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
(0-4) Low	2	2.9	0	0	2	2.9
(5-8)Average	66	97.0	68	100	66	97.0
(9-12) High	0	0	0	0	0	0

(f= Frequency, %= Percentage, n = number of students)

Table 2 shows the writing task wise level of students with frequency and percent on pre-test. The total marks of the pre-test were 12 and each task of writing consisted of 4 marks. The highest percentage (100) which belongs to the level of (5-8) shows that students were strongest at average level in the task of summary writing. On the other hand, lowest percentage (0) which belongs to high (9-12) shows that students were weakest at high level in all the three writing tasks.

H_{01} : There is no significant difference between the vocabulary of the text in blogging and pen &

paper groups.

Table: 3 Difference between the vocabulary of blogging and pen & paper groups on posttest

Task	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p.
Essay	Pen & paper	34	2.82	1.05	-5.30	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	4.06	0.58			
Summary	Pen & paper	34	2.81	1.04	-5.28	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	4.09	0.56			
Character	Pen & paper	34	2.80	1.01	-5.26	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	4.05	0.55			

Significance Level: $\alpha = 0.05$

Independent sample t-test in table 3 showed that there was a significant difference between the post-test related to vocabulary of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings of blogging and pen & paper group which was significant at 0.05 level. There was an improvement in the vocabulary of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings in the blogging group after undergoing the treatment. Therefore, the 1st null hypothesis was rejected, as the treatment given to the blogging group in terms of vocabulary made the difference in all the three tasks.

H_{02} : There is no significant difference between the language of text in blogging and pen & paper groups.

Table: 4 Difference between the language of blogging and pen & paper groups on posttest

Task	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p.
Essay	Pen-and-paper	34	2.71	0.79	-5.77	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	3.82	0.79			
Summary	Pen-and-paper	34	2.70	0.78	-5.79	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	3.83	0.80			
Character	Pen-and-paper	34	2.70	0.78	-5.80	66	0.00
	Blogging	34	3.83	0.81			

Significance Level: $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 4 showed the result of post-test which specify that language in essay, summary, and character-sketch writings of blogging group was significantly different from that of pen & paper group at 0.05 level. There was an improvement in the language of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings in the blogging group after undergoing the treatment. Thus, the 2nd null hypothesis was rejected, as the treatment given to the blogging group made a significant difference in the language of text written in all the three tasks.

Discussion

The effectiveness of blogging and pen & paper was assessed by administering pre and post-test prior to and after the treatment. A pre-test was administered to know the performance in English writing of each student and to justly equalize into two groups on the basis of marks obtained in the pretest. The analysis of writing aspects in pre-test revealed that unfortunately none of the students achieved any score in the language use, and mechanics of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings. Majority of the students were better in vocabulary of essay writing. 15 students secured average score

in essay, summary, and character-sketch writings in each aspect of English writing.

Writing task wise analysis revealed that in summary writing 66 students achieved the range of 4-7 marks. On the other hand, lowest percentage 0 which belonged to the range of 8-10 showed that students were weakest in the tasks of essay, summary, and character-sketch writings, none of the students achieved eight or more than eight marks in any task out of 10 marks. The pretest showed that weaknesses in writing consisted of poor sentence structure, improper vocabulary, lack of ideas, and grammar errors etc. thus, they were weak in overall English writing performance on pre-test.

Comparison of the pre-test mean of both the control and experimental groups in terms of vocabulary and language use in essay, summary, and character writings reflected that there was no significant difference between the two groups. The results of study are aligned with the findings of research studies conducted by Subadrah (2020) “The Effects of Utilizing Smart Phones in Enhancing Students’ English Essay writing Skills in Pakistan” and Susan (2016) “ Blogging as an Instructional Tool in ESL Classroom”. They used mixed-ability equivalent groups before the start of experiment in their studies. Therefore, the researcher’s method is valid, furthermore this method minimizes the ability bias on the part of the students.

There was a significant difference between the vocabulary and language use of text in blogging and pen-and-paper groups in essay, summary, and character-sketch writings after posttest. This finding is in accordance with the findings of research studies conducted by Hajar (2013) “Effect of blogging on essay writing performance of Iranian graduate students” and Subadrah (2020) “The Effects of Utilizing Smart Phones in Enhancing Students’ English Essay writing Skills in Pakistan” These research studies proved that online writing tools are effective in improving writing skills in terms of vocabulary and language use of text.

Conclusion

Significant difference was found between the control and experimental groups in terms of vocabulary and language use in all the three writing tasks i.e., essay, summary, and character-sketch. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected. It is concluded that the students using blogging improved their vocabulary and use of language in writing more than those using pen-and-paper in all the three writing tasks. The present study proved that writing tools by themselves could not affect the quality of writing. The use of internet and technology in this study motivated the students to write more eagerly as they liked innovation in learning of English writing as compared to traditional pen-and-paper tools of learning writing and practicing it. The students of blogging group enjoyed their writing process and improved in writing performance by receiving multiple feedback from their peers and teacher.

Recommendations

English teachers are recommended to use the tools like blogging for enhancing motivational level of students. For that they may use videos, pictures, and links of different websites for making writing vocabulary and language use more convincing. Teachers need to conduct practical training sessions with the students so that they may clearly understand the process of posting, commenting, and reviewing. Means of continuous feedback may be devised by the teacher to refine the English writing and make it error free. Teachers are recommended to employ blogging as out-of-class assignment. Doing this some features of blogging such as time-and-place independent communication and many-to-many communication could be used at its full potential and students will have enough time to write and can get more feedback and discussion with larger

audience.

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